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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the issues and opportunities for information providers in a digital environment where the skills of management of change and leadership are necessary to create vital and healthy organizations. The first section discusses challenges of the digital environment and skills for the information profession, including the impact of technology, the changing role of the library, and core skills for library staff (e.g., management, information technology, teamwork, strategic thinking, and customer service skills). The second section describes how the State Library of Victoria (Australia) is addressing these challenges with staff and management development programs, including: (1) staff workshops on information service values related to customers, knowledge, teamwork, collections, and environment; (2) staff, leadership, and management training focusing on communication/interpersonal, marketing/promotion, technology self/team management, change management, problem-solving, mission/vision/values, and task-specific skills, as well as five leadership values (self-awareness, stands in the future, customer focus, collaborative spirit, and bias for action); and (3) management development training developed in collaboration with the University of Melbourne and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University. The third section covers ways of thinking about organizations and managers, including organizations as many things at once and the roles of managers and leaders. (Contains 17 references.) (MES)

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Changing our Future: Issues in Leadership and Management Skills and the Information Profession

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Proceedings

Changing our future: issues in leadership and management skills and the information profession.

Prue Mercer

Introduction

Information services and libraries now provide inherently paradoxical services by delivering the real and the virtual, with high tech and high touch services connecting people and technology. Tensions around the value of information services are reflected in the culture of our organisations and the way we approach balancing and optimising these paradoxes.

This paper proposes that current and future managers of information and library services must be adaptive managers who have developed the key skills of managing change and leadership through learning and understanding the processes and values which sustain their organisation's purpose. Active participation in organisational leadership is one of the challenges for the profession in a world where the relevance of libraries and librarianship is openly questioned and demonstrated through our distribution of information via tools such as the Internet.

In this context the paper explores the issues and opportunities for information providers in a digital environment where the skills of management of change and leadership are necessary to create vital and healthy organisations. These skills can be acquired from understanding ways of thinking about management and organisations. This paper questions popular notions of the leadership dynamic where leaders have been seen to be born or instinctive. Examples of developing different ways of learning about leadership are provided from management development programs for current and aspiring managers at the State Library of Victoria.

Challenges of the Digital Environment and Skills for the Information Profession

There are many assertions about the impact of technology on the world of information and libraries - from the enthusiastic technophile approach, such as that 'by 2047 ...all information about physical objects, including humans, buildings, processes and organisations, will be online' (Bell and Gray, 1997:5), to the more moderate approach using metaphor to describe technology as tool, text, system and ecology where an information ecology is a system of people, practices, values and technologies in a local environment (Nardi and O'Day 1999).

It is clear that libraries are in a time of significant change. Aspects of the traditional role of the library are being challenged by the easy availability of digital information and converging technologies. As a result libraries are redefining their role and value in society. This process is revealing inherent tensions in our capacity to manage paradox and to be real and virtual (print and electronic, the hybrid integrated library), 'there and not there' (part of the economy of presence where remote and local services exist according to availability and cost)(Mitchell and Strimpel, 1997), and 'high tech and high touch' (Naisbitt, 1982), where technology is aligned with personal elements, such as self-customisation of software.

Martell (2000) describes these paradoxes as historical discontinuities - time and space, mind and body, real and virtual, and humans and technology. His conclusion is that within twenty-five years the physical symbol of the library will no longer be viable to describe what librarians do, but that librarians will remake the image of libraries by creating a virtual library space.

For information and library users uncertainty is pervasive in the seemingly certain technological environment. There is an overwhelming amount of information in multiple formats and users require assistance in making sense of this and finding and understanding information. Up to now capital and status in the profession has been based around 'things' rather than processes and interactions. Identifying and accessing documents has been the primary role. This bibliographical paradigm has meant that systems of work have focussed on texts and sources and not on the process of information seeking.

There are emerging ways to create a virtual library space beyond digital content and include new services, such as email reference, online on call systems, online tutorials and interactive training systems. At the State Library of Victoria we have a digital reference program to explore and extend these services.

Libraries (real and virtual, hybrid and complex) are:

- The memory of society
- Provide access to learning resources and works of creativity
- Provide opportunities for a variety of cultural pursuits
- Empower individuals with information skills
- Provide a socially inclusive and creative environment

Challenges to the role of libraries, and the redefinition of the value of this role, demand a different style of management and leadership and new skills for the information profession.

There is much research and analysis on the issue of skills in the information sector. Last year CREATE Australia published a training package in library and information competencies for certificate and diploma courses. The 1998 report from the United Kingdom Libraries and Information Commission (LIC, now replaced by the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries) *Building the new library network* devotes an appendix to skills. This is a comprehensive analysis of a number of recent studies and projects and focuses on the impact of the environment on skills of library staff.

The core skills highlighted are:

- Management skills, especially for leadership, cultural change and finance to support the change
- Information technology skills and competence
- Approaches to and skills in working in groups and teams
- Strategic thinking skills
- Customer service skills

A report by TFPL Ltd (1999) commissioned by the LIC found that information management skills are important for the knowledge management environment. The needed skills range from understanding the business processes of the organisation to change management, to leveraging information technology to document and information management. The link with traditional information service skills are in the core set of information literacies - finding, appraising and using information - the interactive information seeking process skills.

The National Library of Canada's work on core competencies (Scott, 1998) highlighted skill sets covering communication, information technology, dealing with change, organisational (planning and managing work and priorities), problem-solving, teamwork, self-management, corporate (mission and values, marketing and promotion). Competencies required under specialised activities are service (to public), people management, process and organisational management and systems and information technology support. Specific skills under change include adaptability as well as the ability to deal with ambiguity.

Addressing the Challenges with Staff and Management Development Programs

At the State Library of Victoria we have implemented a number of approaches to developing skills. These are part of our whole environment of change where we have been re-focussing on our users, our building redevelopment, our role with public and regional library communities, our role as a cultural institution, our role as information professionals, and encouraging the growth of online technology including digitisation programs and integrated system development.

Within the information services division (State Library Services) our approach has also included best practice reviews, digital reference service initiatives, lifelong learning programs, staff training and development and establishing service values. In staff training we have encompassed developing a skill sets or competency framework to working with other libraries in collaborative training programs.

Information Service Values

We wanted a cohesive and shared understanding of the core values that underpin and inform actions, services and processes. The values evolved as a result of a series of information services staff workshops, and are reinforced in annual staff performance management plans and policy documents. They are:

Customers

We value an open, inclusive and equitable service that promotes customer awareness and ensures understanding of information resources.

Knowledge

We value intellectual curiosity, specialised knowledge and creative approaches to customer service and information delivery.

Teamwork

We value a dynamic and co-operative work environment, fostering strong teamwork and a collaborative approach to achieving our goals.

Collections

We value the library's collections and information resources and the potential of new technologies to make them accessible to our customers.

Environment

We value a secure, responsive and welcoming information environment that promotes customer confidence in the library and its services.

Staff, Leadership and Management Training

In 1998 internal training specialists and managers developed a framework of skill sets to support the existing individual training needs analysis process, and the identification of training priorities in strategic and business plans. The framework has operated since then in conjunction with skills auditing processes which enable staff to assess their learning needs.

Skill sets in this framework are:

- Communication and interpersonal skills

- Marketing and promotion
- Technologies
- Self and team management
- Change management
- Problem-solving
- Mission, vision and values
- Task specific skills and knowledge

Over the past two years we have focussed a large number of training programs on technologies and self and team management. This aligned with organisation-wide initiatives as well as arising from specific application needs and uses. For example, we provided over 14 programs for staff in the last year under technologies, from Kinetica to HTML. From 1997 to 1999 there were 22.

Management training has intentionally targeted the area of leadership development. For example, in December 1998 senior managers attended a workshop with Alistair Mant on *Intelligent Leadership*; and, in February 1999 (for all self-nominating staff) we held 'Leading from any position in the organisation' workshops with external trainers which focussed on exploring five leadership values:

- Self awareness
- Stands in the future
- Customer focus
- Collaborative spirit
- Bias for action

This was a highly successful program and staff gained the skills to participate in organisational leadership.

Collaborative Management Development Training

In July 1999 we formed a collaborative partnership with the University of Melbourne and RMIT University. This was as a result of identifying a common need for a management and leadership development program for about 80 middle managers, or those with the potential to move into those roles.

The needs analysis process at each institution had identified:

- Need for staff to recognise assumptions about behaviours
- Issues about influencing up and down the line
- Need for understanding context of work - norms, values and power dynamics
- Issues around accountability and responsibility so staff can lead from any position in the organisation

The program focussed on these areas and employed a training consultant to deliver a customised experiential program. The program started with a keynote speaker to highlight the issues in the context of library roles, then moved to a series of workshops over two days, with a follow up half day session several weeks later. Activities included identifying communication styles personally through to study groups for peer learning. To date we have evaluated the impact in two stages. The first from immediate reactions, and the second from a focus group a year later.

Immediate reactions reported that the most important points learned were leadership, assertiveness and influencing skills, particularly in communication with staff; change management was identified as something to be covered in the future. There was clearly value in establishing reflective practices - 'All learning helps, but I need to reflect'.

The focus group assessment highlighted that meeting with people from other institutions was valuable as well as taking time out (reflective practice), and going to an environment external to the usual work place. The main benefits participants reported were in using the skills and understanding gained about communication and influencing in interactions with staff and their own managers. Some comments - ' I have been practising more as a driver'; ' The training has given me more confidence to bring out personal skills - '; ' I have been allowing team members to be influential'.

The benefits of this training reinforced the 'leading from any position' approach and the value of learning influencing skills to facilitate participation in organisational leadership. As well it endorsed developing reflective approaches to managing.

A further course for staff who attended will focus on collaborative and interdependent leadership styles, and using adaptive planning approaches with groups and teams.

Ways of Thinking about Organisations and Managers

Developing and evaluating development and learning programs led to exploring management and leadership skills and concepts, and in particular, research narratives on organisations, leadership and change.

Organisations are Many Things at Once

Information service providers work in buildings, offices, on computers, telephones and reading rooms as employees of private and public companies, schools, colleges and educational institutions, governments and government agencies. They are members of organisations. Organisations are complex paradoxical phenomena that can be understood in many different ways. An organisation being an intangible concept unlike a building or a school. It is derived from the Greek word *organon* meaning tool or instrument. There is no one way to define an organisation which applies to all the places people work.

Morgan (1997) proposes that our theories and approaches to organisational life are based on metaphors that lead us to understand and see organisations distinctively. Many of our conventional ideas about organisations and management build on a small number of taken for granted images or metaphors, especially mechanical and biological ones, reflecting the influence of early management theorists such as Taylor and the idea of there being one best way to manage.

We use a metaphor or an image to describe a relationship between things. The value of recognising and understanding metaphor is because it is an entry point into the cultural knowledges which have been encoded by our narratives or stories and the processes we have used to make sense of phenomena around us.

In his study Morgan (1997) selects eight key images of organisations from a range of diverse sources from organisation and leadership research. This aims to develop a way of thinking that can cope with ambiguity and paradox, beyond the mechanistic or organism approaches. A reading of an organisation could involve a systems perspective, a change perspective, a cultural or mechanistic perspective as well as a psychoanalytic. For example, an analysis of the pattern of events in a public library system with philosophical differences about how it should grow and develop in terms of a technology partnership could be interpreted:

By the machine metaphor as an organisation drifting into mechanistic ways.

By the organism metaphor as an organisation out of alignment with external challenges.

By the culture metaphor as the 'old' style of service being reproduced in the ' new' partnership.

By the political metaphor as an organisation that has been factionalised as a result of the competing interests of the managers competing over the changes.

Within that interpretation one metaphor will be dominant, the others will be supplementary. In this case the dominant one would be the organism metaphor.

Bolman and Deal (1991) focus on four frames - the structural, the human resource, the political and the symbolic. Senge (1990) uses the term 'mental model' to describe an individual's distinctive perspective on an organisation. This is a world of multiple cultures, stories and narratives, and reading what is happening in your organisation is a key competence for managers.

What managers and leaders do

In the same way that images and narratives of organisations frame our thinking about organisational life, the story of leadership is embedded in the narrative of leadership research, concepts and ideas. In the 1960s and 1970s the literature on leadership stressed openness, sensitivity and participation. In the 1980s we heard of concepts such as 'management by walking about'. Writers argue the split of roles between a leader and a manager.

Mant (1997) notes differences between the European and American approaches to research in management, resulting in the split in the American narrative between a leader and a manager, but an integrated approach in the European tradition.

Our management and business culture has been influenced by Taylorism or the scientific approach to management, and this can be linked to traditional approaches to knowledge in our universities which has flowed through to business schools (Weisbord 1987;Schon, 1983; Morgan 1997).

However management is about phenomena and not suited to be viewed as part of the tradition of scientific reductionism (through the legacy of our research and university systems), unlike medicine or engineering where physical evidence leads to certain outcomes. Managers quite often do not use the methods they are supposed to (Schon, 1983). Rather they engage with the unique circumstance before them, such as an opportunity to develop a new service, using individual approaches to resolve a unique problem and in so doing contribute to and participate in the knowledge base and learning systems of their organisation.

Processes, like service and product development, require participation in an organisational dynamic involving status, competence, confidence and individual win-lose approaches. Data, such as market research helps, but a manager needs vision and confidence to make a decision, as the information in these processes will never be complete. Schon analyses the art of managing as reflection in action, but maintains that this intuitive thinking is often not articulated, hence perpetuates one of the myths in management that one must choose between practice based on management science (there is a right way) and an essentially mysterious artistry (people are born leaders).

Decades of leadership research have failed to inform how to create effective leadership (Argyris, 2000). One of the key Australian business leaders of the last decade (from the United States) Blount (1999:183) notes, 'My sense as a comparative outsider has been that Australians broadly view leadership as something rather uncomfortable, the job for the masochist, the insanely ambitious, the workaholic, or the outsider'. However he also reported that he had changed his view on leadership in a speech to the Institute of Company Directors in Melbourne, December 1999, and believed that leaders are made, not born, and that leadership is about addressing how to make a positive change in the environment - leaders of the future are about managing change.

To succeed managers must now be skilled managers of change. However the narrative in the management research culture on change and leadership has tended to confuse or cloud the issues around how these skills are acquired and enacted. In a range of organisations and industries a lot of change initiatives fail (Senge, 1999). A large part of the cause of this failure tends to be because the high focus on projects undermines the human dimensions of change. Project plans often do not

allow for the time it takes to work with people to make changes. People tend to focus solutions on task rather then changing themselves.

Summary

In our current environment managing change and leadership are significant skills identified for sustainability as libraries, librarians and information services professions with a role in the digital future.

In a profession where capital has traditionally been based on technical knowledge and things or artifacts we are challenged in understanding the processes behind successful change and leadership.

The research culture on change and leadership has obscured the dynamic nature of these skills. Failure to sustain significant change occurs again and again. Leadership research cannot inform us how to create or become effective leaders.

Organisations are many things at once - they consist of multiple realities, ambiguities and paradoxes. Change and leadership issues get caught up in the dynamics of these processes and these processes are played out in the organisation's culture. These tensions are compounded by the challenges to libraries.

Leaders and managers must have the ability to work in an environment of continuous planning and review where interdependent relationships create a different dynamic, accountability and role. This 'adaptive' manager and leader is an enabler who facilitates people to be leaders themselves.

Successful organisations with the capacity to adapt to change are built on the systemic building blocks of the group, clear organisational purpose and accountable leaders. These enable people in organisations to move from a mechanical world of measures, plans and programs and control to a living world where responses to change are dynamic and interdependent. And in so doing the capacity of the organisation to embed reflective practice into organisational life is enhanced.

Conclusion

Working with dynamic processes can be learnt. The experience of our management development programs shows that there is enormous value in focussing on influencing skills which build an understanding of the processes in enabling and communicating. These are the foundations of our future adaptive managers.

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